How many dogs have died in the Iditarod?

In most of the 29 Iditarod races, at least one dog death has occurred. The first race is reported to have resulted in the deaths of 15 to 19 dogs. In 1997, the *Anchorage Daily News* reported that "at least 107 [dogs] have died" over the history of the event. Since then more deaths have occurred—five dog deaths in 1997, one each in 1998-2000, two in 2001, one in 2002, and one in 2003—bringing the grand total of dogs who have died in the Iditarod to around 120. There is no official count of dog deaths available for the race's early years,making any dog death tally only an estimate.

In 1999, musher Jeremy Gebauer's five-year-old dog, Rodman, died after running 650 miles in the race. In 1998, Trim, a five-year-old sled dog in the team of musher Linda Joy, collapsed and died after more than 1,000 miles on the trail, while two other dogs, ages seven and one-and-a-half, collapsed during the race and died after its conclusion. Race rules allow mushers to continue "unless it's determined the death could have been avoided," according to the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*.

Causes of death during the last decade have included strangulation in towlines, internal hemorrhaging after being gouged by a sled, liver injury from collision, heart failure, and pneumonia. "Sudden death" and "exertional myopathy," a condition in which a dog's muscles and organs deteriorate during extreme or prolonged exercise, have also been blamed. Noted by the *Anchorage Daily News* as the musher who "led the transformation of the Iditarod from a leisurely 16-day race to a 10-day hotly contested event," five-time Iditarod winner Rick Swenson was disqualified from the 1996 race after a dog died while he mushed his team through waist-deep overflow, a combination of water and frozen slush pooled on the surface of a frozen river. In 1985, a musher was disqualified after he kicked his dog and the animal died. The 1975 winner, Jerry Riley, was banned for life in 1990 after being accused of striking a dog with a snow hook.